Mi-Map

Organizing Staff Communications

Why go this route?

A clear, complete, coordinated system for communicating to all staff will set the tone of an organized, well-run school because

- Clear values, expectations and procedures will be consistently communicated to all staff.
- New staff can understand and adjust to the culture of the building more easily.
- Routine tasks can be completed efficiently when everyone is regularly reminded of building goals, procedures and timelines.
- Staff has more trust in the building leadership when information is shared honestly and promptly.

You'll know you've arrived when...

You achieve these unit tests of effective communication systems referenced in Elaine McEwan's book 7 Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership (2003):

- Principal and staff routinely use 2-way communication to address the standards and improvement goals of the school.
- Principal is available for informal encounters with all staff.
- A clear, complete and useful Staff Handbook is published and used by all staff.
- A regular staff bulletin is given to all staff at least each week.
- Staff meetings are reserved for celebrating success, professional sharing, and group decision making.

Construction Zone

It's about TIME

- Communication takes time, but as an educational leader communication is your primary responsibility. You must make the time to be available and to actively listen to staff comments, ideas, and concerns.
- Formalizing systems for communicating with staff (handbook, regular bulletin, personal contacts) will maximize effective use of your time.
- A significant amount of time should be set aside to develop a handbook if you are starting from scratch. Be sure to add the extra time necessary for your secretary to produce the handbook, once it's designed.

Potential COSTS

- There are no significant costs except for the initial printing of the Staff Handbook. We estimate $10 per staff member for printing and materials.

The Process

A step-by-step guide to developing a communication system for staff

NOTE: Steps marked with a ● are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

1 **Identify which elements** of a comprehensive communication system you already have:

a. **STAFF HANDBOOK** See Process One (and inserts A-F)

b. **STAFF BULLETIN** See Process Two (and inserts G and H)

c. **PRO-ACTIVE CULTURE OF COMMUNICATION** See Process Three (and inserts I and J)

● 2 **Work on those you don't have,** one at a time, probably in a-b-c order.

We've included three step-by-step processes in this packet, one for each element. Work through the one you've chosen with reference to the inserts and samples relevant to each step. Then consider moving on to the next one.

3 **Set aside the time** you need for on-going maintenance of the system.

Once the elements of your system are operational, they need regular attention, and only the building leader can hold the system steady for others to use. This means you should do the following:

- Schedule time each week to compose/complete the staff bulletin.
- Protect time each week for the building secretary to pull together the staff bulletin, make copies and distribute them to staff mailboxes.
- Start a Faculty Advisory Team to meet bi-weekly to share concerns and plan for staff meetings.
- Schedule staff meetings on the master calendar and post topics (with the assistance of the Faculty Advisory Team) at least a month in advance.
- Establish an "open door" policy with staff, and check periodically to see how well you're doing. Make a note to yourself (on your monthly to-do list, if you're using MI-Map Packet 1:4 *"Organizing the School Year"*) to periodically check staff's perception of how well you're doing at "Keeping your doors open."
- Schedule grade-level meeting times, and plan a rotation that allows you to attend each meeting at least once a month.
- Plan a schedule for discussing a school improvement goal or some aspect of standards at each staff meeting. Keep it brief and interactive.

Getting more mileage from organizing staff communications

How organizing staff communications benefits your school in regards to the following initiatives:

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

- The responsibility and accountability of all staff is accelerated under NCLB. From the first time a school is identified for improvement, consultation with the staff is required in developing the school plan for improvement. If a school continues to fail to make AYP, all staff is at risk for transfer or job loss. (*K-12 Principals' Guide to No Child Left Behind*, 2003 NASSP)

  NCLB is the law; the principal must embrace it and communicate its meaning to staff.

Education YES!

- The principal communicates the school's shared vision, and works with staff to improve student achievement, but the staff is responsible for learning in their classrooms. The staff must know the Grade Level Content Expectations, understand the grade-level curriculum and manage instructional activities to maximize the achievement of all their students. Staff must have all the information possible and the time necessary to teach their students.

MI-Plan

- Step 1, pages 1-10 (*Assess Readiness to Benefit*) includes the principal contacting district staff, increasing staff awareness and putting together a School Improvement Team/Steering Committee.

Resources

Books

The Principal's Book of Lists

Ramsey, John Wiley & Sons. 2002.

This information source is packed with the most used and useful lists available to help Principals work smarter and faster in many aspects of the job as a school administrator.

People

Specialists

Most Intermediate School Districts have a specialist working with schools on school improvement in their service areas.

Coaches

The *Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools* website lists coaches whose training has been provided by Michigan State University and supported by the Michigan Department of Education. Some are active in school improvement implementation in Michigan schools. Please visit:

www.abcscoaches.org

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Associations

National Association of
Elementary School Principals
http://www.naesp.org

National Association of
Secondary School Principals
http://www.nassp.org

Association of Supervision
and Curriculum Development
http://www.ascd.org

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MICHIGAN Department of Education
Office of School Improvement

www.michigan.gov/mde

Process One (of 3)

A step-by-step guide for a

STAFF HANDBOOK

NOTE: **Steps marked with a ● are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.**

1 **Collect sample Staff Handbooks** from other schools and other districts.

❷ **Create a *DRAFT* Table of Contents** for the Building Staff Handbook with district or state required information completed. INSERT A Handbook offers a sample.

3 **Tell the staff you'll be preparing a handbook** and have staff suggest material and tasks to include in "their" handbook.

Share with staff the need for clear, written expectations with timelines and procedures for routine and regular building tasks. Explain that while you want and need their input, you will be the editor and make final decisions about content and format. Start by soliciting comments on the Table of Contents.

❹ **Collect or draft sections** for the handbook. INSERTS B-F Handbook offer some model pages.

❺ **Review and revise** sections.

a. Schedule a staff work-session. Assign heterogeneous groups (across grade levels and subjects). Staff members write their suggestions after reviewing the draft handbook and sample materials. The staff work session is a good time for staff members to volunteer to fill any openings on necessary committees. INSERT B Handbook suggests a page of committee assignments.

b. Collect and review staff work. Revise as needed. Save revisions on disk.

c. Give revised handbook to key staff or peers for their final comments.

6 **Publish the final version** with page numbers and date of publication on each page.

Put finished handbooks into "distinctive," numbered, 3-ring binders or have them bound in some way to keep all pages together (binders take up more space but allow easy addition of new materials).

7 **Assign a numbered binder** to each staff member. Place an extra binder in the staff lounge/work area for easy reference.

8 **Set up a "Handbook File"** in the office to collect ideas for revising and adding to the handbook.

Also keep copies of any additional material that are given to the staff for their handbooks throughout the school year in this office copy. At each marking period, you or a designee can collect and organize information for necessary revisions.

9 **Collect all handbooks** as part of teacher check out in June for updating. Re-issue revised handbooks during August orientation.

Some schools have teachers keep their handbooks and give them new information to add each year. Others electronically pass out handbooks through e-mail or by giving teachers their own disks. Changes and updates should be easily distinguished by using different fonts, colors, or by dating each page.

10 Prepare an abridged version for substitute teachers and give it to them when they report to the office.

Include Emergency Procedures, Daily Expectations for Guest Teachers and key information (e.g. behavior plan, schedule, attendance procedures).

Mi Map

Process Two (of 3)

A step-by-step guide for a

STAFF BULLETIN

NOTE: **Steps marked with a ● are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.**

1. **Create a catchy title** for your weekly memo: The Jordan Journal, The Weekly Word, Principally Speaking. Insert G-H Bulletin offers a sample format.
2. **Establish and protect a regular time** for you to assemble the weekly message.
3. **Schedule time for you or your secretary** to type, copy, and disseminate the staff bulletin.
4. **Create YOUR system for collecting items** that you need to share or reinforce each week. Enter these items periodically into your template. **Do Not Wait Until the Deadline Day to Enter All the Information.**
5. **Collect stories, jokes and cartoons** to bring laughter into the building routine.
6. **Have a regular item recognizing staff efforts** and achievements.
7. **Include special events** (staff birthdays).
8. **Include a regular comment section** to "Wave the Flag" for your school's improvement efforts and focus attention on standards. Keep the goals and data in front of the staff.
9. **Look for professional articles** to share in the weekly bulletin.
10. Encourage staff to discuss and question the information you share in the bulletin.
11. **Create a "Daily Up-Date"** for last minute changes: staff absences, schedule changes, special activities or any other needed announcement. "Daily Up-Date" can be delegated to your secretary or an aide to run off. Place it in staff mailboxes, post it in the teachers' work area, send it by e-mail, or post it to a staff electronic bulletin board. See Insert H Bulletin for a sample "Daily Up-Date Form"

Process Three (of 3)

A step-by-step guide for a

CULTURE OF PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION

NOTE: Steps marked with a ● are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

1 **Find out what your Staff is saying** about your school.

See MI-Map Packets 3:1 *"Setting up a Culture Committee,"* and 3:2 "*Auditing your School Culture*" for listening techniques. Take action to address any staff concerns. Fix what you can and enter into an open dialogue about concerns that are beyond your control or require broader support to address. Make sure everyone realizes that they are ambassadors for your school and district. "You cannot throw mud at others without getting yourself dirty."

2 **Invite the staff to select representatives** from each grade level or discipline to meet with you bi-weekly.

Use this "Faculty Advisory Committee" to discuss concerns, plan for major events, and share information.

3 **Note staff meetings and faculty Advisory meetings** on the master schedule.

Identify agendas for staff meetings with the help of the Faculty Advisory Committee. Reserve this meeting time firmly for professional sharing or discussion of topics concerning entire staff. Announcements, updates and routine matters should be disseminated with memos. INSERT I and J Culture offer a sample and a blank template for staff meeting agendas.

4 **Add grade level meetings to the master calendar.**

Cycle through these meetings to keep abreast of each grade level's concerns and plans. Use this time to share successes and discuss concerns about individual students.

5 Make it a priority to **greet every staff member** each day.

Schedule the time to get to each room and say hello or wave to acknowledge your appreciation and support.

6 Set up a plan to **note and share a written comment** on a positive activity in each classroom at least every month.

Make your notes specific. Be systematic. Start each month with a list of teachers and check off the ones you've done so you can spend time with those to whom you still owe a note (Note – some of the companies that are contracted to take school pictures will supply note cards and award sheets to the principal free of charge).

7 **Pay attention to your own communication.**

We speak to others in three ways: with our words, with our policies and with our actions. Do you take pains to be patient, positive and supportive? Is your staff willing to try new things, to take risks, to speak openly? If not, what else can you do to open two-way communication?

Mi-Map